DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 482 CS 011 229

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TITLE The Effect of Reading Aloud on a Child's Reading for Pleasure after Entering School.
PUB DATE May 93
NOTE 38p.; M.A. Thesis, Kean College of New Jersey.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; Elementary School Students; *Independent Reading; Parent Participation; *Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Habits; Reading Research; *Recreational Reading
IDENTIFIERS Cranford Public Schools NJ; Descriptive Research

ABSTRACT

A descriptive study examined whether reading aloud to children regularly would have an effect on creating independent readers. Subjects, 269 preschool through third-grade students in Cranford, New Jersey, were given a questionnaire to be completed by the parents. Ninety-one questionnaires representing 200 children (ranging in age from 3 months to 17 years of age) were returned for a response rate of 34%. Results indicated that a strong background of being read aloud to beginning during infancy had a positive effect on children's choices to read independently in their leisure time. (Eleven tables of data are included; 30 references, the cover letter to parents, and the questionnaire are attached.) (Author/RS)

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ED355482

The Effect of Reading Aloud on a Child's Reading for Pleasure after Entering School

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Approved
4/1/93

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in Education
Kean College of New Jersey
May, 1993

CS011229

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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study examined whether reading aloud to children regularly would have an effect on creating an independent reader. Subjects, two hundred sixty-nine (269) preschool through third grade students in Cranford, New Jersey, were given a questionnaire to be completed by the parents. Ninety-one (91) questionnaires representing two hundred (200) children were returned for a response rate of thirty-four percent (34%). Results indicated that a strong background of being read aloud to beginning during infancy had a positive effect on the child's choice to read independently in his leisure time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my husband and family for their support and understanding during this project.

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Reading aloud to children builds the desire to read (Kimmel and Segel, 1988). Children learn that exciting stories come from books and that reading for pleasure is worth including in their leisure activities. One important educational advantage of reading aloud is what the listener automatically picks up about written language. Children become acquainted with the complexities and sophisticated grammatical forms found in written texts (Perara, 1984). This knowledge of literary language is useful when the child starts to read on his own.

Jim Trelease (1989) a leading advocate of reading aloud, believes that to develop the appetite for reading we must advertise the "product" repeatedly. In his opinion, reading aloud to children allows the child to sample the delights of reading and conditions him to believe that reading is a pleasurable experience. Martinez and Teale (1988) in their observational study of a kindergarten class found that the books read most frequently by the teacher were those chosen by the students to explore in their free time.

In an effort to combat the literacy crisis in the United States, the 1985 report of the Commission on Reading stated, "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is

reading aloud to children" (p.23).For the socially disadvantaged child, whose background does not include experiences with books, this activity becomes the job of the teacher. Cohen's study (1986) of second grade students enforced the positive effects of reading aloud. Her efforts with New York City school children showed marked improvements in vocabulary knowledge and increase comprehension levels.

In an attempt to understand the development of a voluntary reader, Lesley Morrow (1990), supported by a grant from Rutgers University Research Council studied the characteristics of young children who show a particularly strong interest in books. Parent questionnaires and teacher evaluations provided data to support her findings that high-interest children (those who read frequently) were read to more often than low-interest children. They also watched less television and had more children's books throughout their homes than the low-interest group.

Frank Smith (1992) believes that children learn from the company they keep. He proposes that two groups of people ensure that a child learns to read and perceives reading as enjoyable. The first group includes those who read to the child, parents, siblings and teachers. They determine whether the child takes the crucial step of

joining the "literacy club". The second group is the authors of the books children love to read. They provide the favorite stories that children know by heart or the predictable stories in which it is obvious what the next word will be before it is encountered.

The motivation to read can overcome learning problems in some cases. Dorothy Butler (1975) describes how Cushla taught herself to read despite the prognosis that she would be severely retarded. This was the outcome of her parents reading to her up to fifteen books a day.Cohen's study (1986) of socially disadvantaged children who come to school with few experiences with books at home further validated the effects of reading aloud. The subjects improved their vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills through being exposed to read along sessions that included books specifically chosen for their emotional appeal.

HYPOTHESIS

To determine if there was additional evidence to support reading aloud as a precursor to reading for pleasure a questionnaire was distributed to parents of kindergarten through third grade students in a suburban school district. It was hypothesized that no correlation

would exist between children who had been frequently read to and those who chose to read for pleasure.

PROCEDURES

A questionnaire (see appendix) was distributed to two hundred sixty-nine (269) children in kindergarten through third grade who attend a K-8 school in the Cranford, New Jersey school system. Ninety-one (91) questionnaires were returned on a voluntary basis yielding a response of thirty-four percent (34%). Parents were encouraged to include all their children in their responses which gave a total of two hundred (200) children ranging in age from three (3) months to seventeen (17) years of age. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire and cover letter were approved by the principal of the school. Data were tabulated for each child and correlations between data and how often the child was read to and how often the child chooses to read independently were computed to determine the validity of the hypothesis of the study. Questions included in this survey focused on how often the child is read to, the types of books chosen for this activity and who normally reads to the child. Also there were questions on how often the child chooses to read for pleasure and what is his preference in reading materials.

RESULTS

As can be seen in Table I, reading aloud to children is

Table I

Which Parent Reads Aloud in the Home

Mothers	Fathers
184	114

a shared responsibility in most families. Mothers read thirty-five percent (35%) more often than fathers, according to the responses.

As can be seen in Table II, the preponderance of

Table II

Frequency of Reading Aloud

Daily	Weekly	2x Week	3-4x Week
165	29	3	3

reading is done on a daily basis with one hundred sixty-five (165) of the children being read to on this basis while twenty-nine (29) children were read to only once each week.

Table III represents the time of day children were read

Table III

Time of Day Reading Aloud Takes Place

Anytime	Afternoon	Evening	Bedtime
13	8	76	95

to on a regular basis. Forty-nine percent (49%) of the respondents prefer to read to their children at bedtime, although thirty-nine percent (39%) of the readers prefer evening for this activity.

Table IV represents the age reading aloud was

Table IV

Age Reading Aloud to Child was Initiated

0-1 yr.	1 yr. - 2 yr.	3 yr. - 4 yr.	5 yr.
115	70	5	0

initiated. Sixty-one percent (61%) of the readers began reading to their children before they were one year old.

As noted in Table V, adult readers predominantly chose

Table V

Types of Material Read to Children

Fiction	Non-Fiction
132	68

fiction books to read aloud over non-fiction. The responses indicated that the reading material ranged from whimsical stories in children's magazines to factual passages in science and geography books.

Table VI represents the source of reading material.

Table VI

Source of Reading Material

Library	Book Store	Grocery Store	Other Sources
88	64	14	49

The library is the primary source. Parents indicated other sources were book clubs, mail order books, and gifts.

Table VII represents how often the child sees the

Table VII

Frequency Child Sees Parent Reading

Daily	Weekly
166	24

parent read. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the respondents read daily.

Table VIII represents the age the child read

Table VIII

Age Child Read Independently

4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years
10	29	70	18

independently. The predominance of children read independently at age six (6).

Responses indicated in Table IX indicate the frequency

Table IX

Frequency Child Chooses to Read

Daily	Weekly
139	46

that children choose to read in their leisure time. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the children read on a daily basis.

Table X indicates the frequency the child chooses books

Table X

Frequency Child Chooses Books from Library

Weekly	Monthly
75	105

to read at the library. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of those surveyed frequented the library on a monthly basis, while forty two percent (42%) visited the library on a weekly basis.

Table XI represents the number of respondents that were

Table XI

Respondents that were Read to as a Child

Yes	No	Couldn't Remember
121	48	31

read to when they were a child. Sixty percent (60%) recalled being read to as a child.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the study lead to several conclusions. First, parents who read aloud to their children have produced independent readers as evidenced in Table IX. Parents initiate this reading in infancy, when the rhythm and intonation of the language provide a sense of security to the child and it then becomes a habitual part of the day. Table I indicates the reader in the family tends to be the mother. This gender choice seems to correlate with the fact that many fathers would rather be seen playing catch with their sons than taking them to the library. It is not by chance that most students in a remedial reading class are boys. "A father's early involvement with books and reading can do much to elevate books to at least the same status as baseball gloves and hockey sticks in a boy's estimation (Trelease, 1989).

Since reading is an acquired skill the fact that seventy-five percent (75%) of the children (Table IX) choose to read on a daily basis demonstrates that the parent's involvement to promote and encourage the reading process is a positive factor. Additionally, it can be seen in Table XI, that the majority of parents were read to as children. This lends credence to Trelease's premise that parent's

"pass on the torch" to future generations when they read aloud to their children. This intimate bonding/teaching element is deemed desirable to pass on to their offspring.

If this study is indicative that there is a significant revival of interest in reading aloud, than it can be assumed that children need the resources available to them to make independent reading readily accessible. Libraries need to update their approaches with more vigor and aggressive marketing. Exemplary library systems in Orlando, Florida and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania extend their efforts by reaching out to new parents. This is in the form of gift books, brochures, education programs and videos aimed at promoting library usage. This type of early intervention is worth focusing in to foster parental involvement with children's leisure reading.

Additionally, teachers must reinforce reading as a pleasurable activity. Unfortunately many educators that are in a position to implement reading aloud on a large scale fail to do so. Whether this is because they have an entrenched interest in other approaches to promote reading, or whether as one school administrator suggests, "they can't believe that anything this simple and inexpensive will work." We need to go on pressing for daily reading aloud in the classroom.

The Effect of Reading Aloud on a Child's Reading for Pleasure after Entering School:

Related Research

Educators agree that the home environment has a tremendous influence on the child's intellectual development. Similarly, research projects across the country are showing that parents who build their children's self assurance and who read to them contribute to their child's vocabulary and their eagerness to explore books on their own (Larrick, 1975).

Reading regularly to children and giving them picture books of their own stimulate their imaginations and help them view reading as relaxing and fun (Elkind, 1989). Reading a story and asking questions draw a child into the reading process (Boegehold, 1984). Such questions help children to better understand the text, recall details, make assumptions based on knowledge and begin to predict outcomes.

Jim Trelease (1990), possibly the United States leading advocate of reading aloud to children, calls reading aloud "advertising"--a commercial for the joy of reading. In 1985 reading aloud received the wholesale endorsement from the Commission on Reading in "Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). It was proclaimed to be the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading.

According to Indrisano (1980) teachers of beginning reading have long observed that children who were read to in their preschool years are more prepared for formal reading instruction and are more successful in learning to read than are children who were not read to early in life. Validation of this observation is found in Durkin's (1966) and Mason's (1977) research.

Carol Chomsky (1972) in her investigative study of linguistic development of elementary school children found that early exposure to the more complex language available through stories read from books goes hand in hand with increased knowledge of the language. She feels the school curriculum should allow the child to be stimulated to read on his own and be read to, not restricting him to material deemed "at his level" but permitted access to books "above his level" to get out of them whatever he may.

For the parent who doesn't perceive reading aloud as a natural part of their home activity numerous authors have suggested ways to teach and inform parents about this rewarding experience and its benefits. The New Haven Public Schools (Criscuolo, 1980) distributes a booklet to parents that answers their questions about reading and corresponds to the school's performance objectives. This booklet encourages the parent to request both oral and written

feedback on the child's reading progress from school. Baker and his colleagues (1975) describe a university non-credit course for parents on children's literature. It introduces parents to good books to share with their children. A similar course by Trezise (1975) exposes parents for six weeks to story books and ways to share them with their children.

Flood (1977) further extends this idea to include the methods to utilize when reading to children at home. He feels that the best style is one of verbal interaction between parent and child using warm-up questions that prepare the child for reading, talk during reading that relates story content to the child's experience, and post story questioning on the story ending.

Flood's (1977) study of preschoolers in the San Francisco Bay area further demonstrated the need for children to be involved in the story being read to them. He tape-recorded reading sessions with no specific instructions to the reader, and analyzed the frequency and type of interaction that was revealed. He concluded there was the need for the child to interact with the reader--their parents--to extend ideas, to question their understanding; and to relate their ideas to experience.

In a study (Yaden, Smalkin, Conlon, 1989) done on

preschoolers, the children's spontaneous questions while being read to by their parents were examined to determine their literacy development. The study included six (6) male and three (3) female children aged three to five who were audiotaped over a period of one to two years. In both studies, the children asked a wide range of questions about both illustrated and unillustrated stories. Their questions included ones on characters and events, character's motives, word meanings, printed word forms, letters, authors, book titles and the act of reading. The most frequently asked questions were about pictures, followed by inquiries on story meaning, and finally word meaning. The authors concluded that home storybook reading may have more effect on children's development of comprehension processes than on their print awareness. The authors propose that, "exposing children to as many sources of written information in the environment as possible before school cannot help but give them the kind of foundation needed for successful mastery of this most complicated human invention."

While parental involvement is stressed by almost all programs for preschool children there is little evidence of parent-focused programs specifically designed to overcome deficits of poorly educated poverty parents. With this in mind, a pilot project (Swift, 1970) was designed to help

mothers gain skills they would consider to be of value for interaction with their children. This training program was designed to enhance the story telling and communication skills of poverty mothers with limited education. Reading was never taught but rather the focus was on training mothers to elaborate thoughts and idea, lengthen and complete thoughts and improve observational skills.

Most researchers have been in agreement that parental involvement in the child's education is beneficial. Programs which emphasize parent-child interaction and help the mother develop teaching skills have produced greater and more lasting results than those programs directed toward the child alone (Karmes, 1970). As a component of a community school system in Maine, Joanne Burgess (1982) initiated a training program for parents of preschool children. Workshops focused on oral reading techniques, letter recognition and visual matching exercises. The significantly higher scores of the children whose parents participated in the training support research findings that reading readiness will increase with this intervention method.

Warren, Prater and Griswold (1990) conducted a nationwide survey of the read aloud practices of working parents. They concluded that despite a limited amount of

home time, parents read to their children from a variety of books commonly found in convenience stores.

Developing a voluntary reader is the major goal of most reading programs. It is assumed by educators that the more you read the better you get at it, and the better you get at it, the more you like it (Samuels, 1988). Greaney (1980) found that fifth grade students spent only 5.4% of their leisure time engaged in reading and 22% did not read at all. One possible explanation for the lack of reading as a choice activity may be that reading programs are often skills related and provide little opportunity for students to read for enjoyment (Spiegel, 1981).

To understand the development of a voluntary reader is to study the characteristics of young children who show a particularly strong interest in books. Efforts to identify these characteristics (Greaney, 1980) (Connor, 1954) have yielded the following information: voluntary readers tend to be girls, to come from small, middle and upper class families, to have a high level of reading achievement, and to be cardholders at public libraries. They also come from homes where there is a supportive "literary environment" as indicated by the availability of books, the amount of reading done with the child, and models of voluntary readers (Hansen, 1969).

A review of leisure time activities reveals the choice of television viewing as the main enemy against reading for pleasure. Today's children aged three to five average fifty-four (54) hours of television a week (Dodson, 1981). Television is viewed as destructive Kimmel and Segel, 1988) since children who watch television segments develop short attention spans and repeated watching robs a child of the visual imagery book reading can produce. The power of television can be readily seen when you review the sales of a book shown on Reading Rainbow, an award winning television series. Prior to the reading of the book on the show, the book had sold only two thousand (2,000) copies. After the show sales jumped to twenty-five thousand (25,000) copies.

The focus of a study (Long and Henderson, 1973) on how children spend their leisure time made the use of time diaries kept by the subjects. Seventy-five (75) boys and seventy-five (75) girls in the fifth grade were selected based on scores from the Gates Mac Ginitie Reading Test. All students read on grade level or above. Time records were kept over a fourteen day period and included categories such as sleep, reading, television watching, homework, chores, organized activities and free play. A summary of results showed television watching as the most popular activity totaling thirty (30) hours a week. This was

followed by free play, organized activity, homework. Chores and reading each totaled less than two (2) hours a week. About a third of the subjects reported no reading during the two week period. This outcome led the teachers in this district to try to provide blocks of time for independent reading.

Consistent with the general focus of this study was Anderson, Wilson and Fielding's (1988) research into the out of school activities of fifth grade students. One hundred fifty-five (155) children from a middle class community in central Illinois recorded their answers to questions over a two (2) to six (6) month period and these results were compared to the child's reading ability based on the Metropolitan Achievement Test. The question focused on was the correlation between pleasure reading and reading proficiency and whether out of school activities could have a causal effect on reading growth. Also considered in this study was the influence of the teacher on how much time children spend reading books during after school hours. The study revealed the major activity of these children was watching television, although the authors felt there was no strong evidence to suggest this negatively affected the amount of time reading was done. The principal conclusion of this study was that the amount of time a child spends

reading books is related to the child's reading level. Also teachers that produced students that read outside of school were those that promote reading, assure access to interesting books at a suitable level and read aloud to their students.

Cohen's (1968) study of socially disadvantaged students made use of reading aloud as the vehicle to stimulate children to achieve competency in reading and increase and strengthen their vocabulary. Two hundred eighty-five (285) second graders in New York City were chosen based on their academic retardation, low socioeconomic status and minority grouping. The selection of fifty (50) books to be used in the classrooms was done based on the need for their ego-centered theme and conceptual simplicity. Additionally visual imagery and emotional identification with characters and plots was crucial to selection. Reading aloud was done each day of the school year yielding the following results in June: The experimental group showed an increase in vocabulary, word knowledge and reading comprehension. It was further implied that these learners need be familiarized with storybook language since their background does not provide this enrichment.

Early readers, those who enter school reading, seem to

possess two (2) familiar characteristics. Durkin's (1966) research showed that these readers come from an environment that gave them access and exposure to printed materials and these children revealed an interest in the reading process by asking questions.

To identify and quantify the reading interests of preschool children Mason and Blanton (1971) chose a stratified sampling of one hundred eighty (180) three, four, and five year old children from Georgia. Specifically, the questions posed were, "Do you like to have stories read to you?", "What stories do you like to hear best?", and "What stories would you like to read if you could read all by yourself?" All the preschoolers questioned expressed an interest in being read to. The majority of children professed an interest in fairy tales, followed by animal stories, television character stories, and stories about machines. A significant percentage of the children expressed a preference for the same story to be read to them or read by them. This conclusion lends support to the theory that beginning reading material should include stories in the categories children prefer in order to capitalize on children's interests.

In an effort to improve Israeli children's reading proficiency Feitelson, Kita and Goldstein (1986) conducted

an experimental study of disadvantaged first graders. Typically these children came from homes where parents do not read to their children. The effects of reading a series format story in the school setting over a period of six (6) months was examined for positive results. The experimental group scored significantly higher on measures of decoding, reading comprehension and active use of language than the control group. Additionally many children in the experimental group induced their families into buying books and began to read on their own a series format many volumed story.

To determine ways to encourage recreational reading Manning and Manning (1984) investigated the effectiveness of three models of recreational reading on reading achievement and attitude. They were: sustained silent reading, peer interaction in which students discuss their reading, and individual teacher-student conferences about the student's reading. Four hundred fifteen (415) fourth grade students were randomly assigned to one of the treatment groups. Post test comparison using the Tukey's HS.D. Test revealed a significance of .01 in both reading achievement and attitude when students were involved in peer interaction groups to discuss their reading. This study suggests that peer interaction to motivate reading be carefully considered

for classroom implementation.

Strickland and Morrow's review of the storybook read aloud project in Israel demonstrates the value of reading to kindergardeners. Twelve (12) classes of approximately thirty-five (35) students each were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. The experimental group were read to for fifteen (15) minutes each day from a story that had no accompanying illustrations. The control group used the time period for a language program. It was noted that typically these students speak a local dialect that differs considerably from the literary Arabic used in reading instruction. The situation these children face in reading instruction is similar to that of illiterates being introduced to a language they do not know. After five (5) months individual tests of listening comprehension and picture story telling showed that the children who had been read to outperformed their peers. They indicated a greater language maturity, a richer vocabulary and a stronger sense of story structure when re-telling a story.

It can be assumed that children who are read to in their preschool years are prepared for formal reading instruction. They view reading as a pleasurable activity and display an increased knowledge of the type of complex language found in stories than those who aren't exposed to

oral reading. Courses to acquaint parents with these benefits and the approach to use with their child are becoming more popular. Whether oral reading at home produces a voluntary reader needs further correlation and study.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

October 29, 1992

Dear Parents:

I am a resident of Cranford with two daughters in the school district. I am currently researching the reading process of elementary children to complete a project at Kean College. Your help in filling out this questionnaire is an important part of my study.

Your responses should take only a few minutes of your time. Please include all of your children in your answers. You may wish to distinguish one child from another by using letters, such as child A, child B, etc. If you feel so inclined, please add any additional comments on your family's reading habits.

All responses will be kept anonymous. Please return this form to your child's classroom teacher by ***Wednesday, November 4th.***
Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Susan Louizides

Encl. 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Age (s) of Children A_____ Grade_____
B_____ Grade_____
C_____ Grade_____
D_____ Grade_____

Who normally reads to your child? Mother __ Father ___

How often do you read to your child? Daily __ Weekly ___

At what time of the day do you read? _____

What types of books/magazines do you read to your child?
_____

Did your child show a preference in reading materials?
Yes____ No_____
At what age did this occur?_____

What is your source for reading materials?
Library_____ Book Store_____ Grocery Store_____ Other____

At what age did your child start reading independently? __

In his/her leisure time, how often does your child choose to read independently? Daily_____ Weekly_____

Does your child choose books at the library to read?
Weekly_____ Monthly_____

Do you have other sources of books? _____
_____

Does you child see you read at home? Daily____ Weekly____

Were you read to as a child? Yes____ No____
If YES, by your Mother _____ Father _____